

RELIGION.

BY EDITH ESCOMBE.

"O, if men bestowed as much labour in the rooting out of vices, and planting in of virtues, as they do in the raising of controversies, neither would there so much hurt be done, nor so great scandal be given in the world."—
Thomas a Kempis.

A MOTHER of three young children, on her return from church where she had heard an eloquent sermon from a well-known preacher, remarked to her husband: "— I have come to the conclusion that I am not religious enough to be a mother!" It was a somewhat airily made confession and denoted no deep sentiment, but it struck me how few women would consider themselves "religious enough" to train the souls of their children.

To hear the bold recital of bible-stories—unmitigated by explanation, unrelieved by the fascinating local colour that lends a charm to anything connected with the East—is almost more than I can bear; or, what is worse, the reading of passages from stereotyped books, each chapter followed by a set catechism.

Unless a mother has her own ideas and ways, the question of religious training is sufficiently difficult. To attempt to teach a child dogma and doctrine, is as near religion in its true sense as grammar or arithmetic; the Church Catechism has, in it, about as much of the love of God as the *British Encyclopædia* or the *Times Dictionary*. There is, in fact, no routine method for bringing to a child's consciousness the knowledge of the love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. Such knowledge is not of words and phrases, there is no formula of expressing the intimate oneness of man and God, "one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God." To try to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to a child, is as reasonable as to start arithmetic with Higher Mathematics. To dilate upon a child's duty to God, is as reasonable as to speak of the duty of a foetus towards

its mother. The child's mind is very receptive, very impressionable. Unlike a grown person, a child is not daunted by the step from the known to the unknown. All around him is mystery, from the whispering in the trees and the eggs in a bird's nest. To him the actuality of the spirit life is no more matter of wonder than the fact of eggs in the hitherto empty nest, or rain and sunshine which make the flowers grow.

The simplest and most practical way to convey an idea to small children, is to show them pictures and tell the story in explanation. There is, in the present-day, no lack of admirable illustrations by which children readily become familiarised with a life other than their own. Children are naturally interested in the idea of tent-life, of slow wanderings in wide deserts, they are attracted by the thought of camels bearing stores, by the notion of Eastern ways and customs. Into this life of desert and plain, it is easy enough to fit the tales of Bible heroes. The story of Adam and Eve will suggest no improbabilities, whilst the unfailing truth of loss in the face of gain can be made comprehensible even to quite young children. Each tale of these great men has some possible application to modern needs, but apart from any lesson, the stories themselves are strong, fine, inspiring. It will often be found necessary to emphasize that these men and women lived in very different times and under quite different conditions, when the law of might was the law of right, but that the modern hero is the man who has learnt to place right before might.

The story of Christ's life is told so simply that little or no comment is required. To most children, miracles present no stumbling-block, whilst the pictures before them, make them able to recognise the Temple, the Eastern Wells, cave-tombs and the flat-roofed buildings of the East, till with this picture-world, and the words read, they fit in a very definite and complete impression.

So far, I have considered the teaching of these Bible narratives apart from any moral application, and on the whole, I think, it were as well not to connect these stories too closely with personal lessons. Neither, should I feel inclined to use these Sunday talks for touching those deeper truths of religion which are best kept for the quiet moments at bed-time, after

prayers have been said, or for those country walks when
"Earth" seems

"Crammed with Heaven,
And every common bush afire with God."

In reference to such moments, it is not easy to advise another, as such thoughts must come spontaneously from each individual consciousness of truth, or as the natural promptings of the heart. In the most part a reverent reserve is better than much speech, and it should be by the consistency of our lives that children learn of the sincerity of our religion. And yet, certain moral facts must be put before children if they are to rear their character on a firm basis.

Children of thirty years ago, were warned that God's eye could always see them however much they tried to hide from Him. Taking the same underlying meaning, and telling it in my own way, I should say that children need never be afraid, even when alone, for God was always watching and guarding and keeping them; to a nervous child, such a thought is a perpetual strength, and in place of fear the love of God is instilled in their hearts. I was recently told of two little girls who were being taken for a turn in a model railway near the water. As the train started on its journey, their father suggested that they were going right off into the river. One of the little girls responded that she was not afraid, because she knew that Jesus would take care of them, and for greater security, suggested that the elder sister should repeat "gentle Jesus" as they sped on their way. In the same way out of the old idea of God's punishing sin, I should show how all wrong-doing brings its own punishment, sometimes in ill to our bodies and often in unhappy thoughts and feelings because we have done wrong, conscious all the time how we ought to have acted. In much the same way, from the crude hard teaching of the past may be evolved the creed of spiritual growth, and of the infinite power of good in the face of evil.

Perhaps, the best teacher is Nature, forever working miracles and telling in parables the deep truths of God. All Nature's ways are parables—"earthly stories with a heavenly meaning"—in which children may learn to realise the eternal mind of God. The everyday conditions of frost, heat, dew, rain

the sun, and moon, and stars, being so many evidences of a supreme order,

" . . . Where within the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own."

I would like children to feel that all life is, or ought to be, religion. It is no pagan pantheism to speak of God in all things, in that all Nature is forever fulfilling and manifesting the one God-law of the Universe. Were children told that the country is God's garden in which he has planted flowers and trees, there would be less ruthless plucking of blossoms for the mere pleasure of acquisition, only to be later cast aside to fade and die. Children should not be allowed to pick flowers unless they have some definite purpose in so doing. Kindness and consideration for animals should be interwoven with a child's religion. No child should be allowed to be cruel even in ignorance—holding a kitten so as to cause pain, or teasing a dumb creature even without hurting it.

The saying of simple prayers by children should, I think, be begun early. I like the old nurse's plan of saying prayers over the babies too young to pray themselves. It is the one definite time in the day, when a child thinks out of his own immediate world into the wider world. Let him by all means pray for those of his own home, but let him also remember a petition for "all people," and, if he wishes to, let him pray for those animals that are his daily companions. I do not think children should be encouraged to ask for the everyday things of existence, but rather they should be lead to connect the idea of prayer with the things of the spirit—truth, love, forgiveness, courage—till gradually they learn to conceive of a soul-self, with special needs and difficulties, as distinguished from the earth-self with its earth needs.

Church-going should be optional. Most children like to be taken to church, but to others the enforced silence and sitting still is irksome to weariness. The only possible training to a child in the ordinary church service is a lesson of patience and self-control, or possibly his ear may be trained by listening to the music. Only once have I known a child fascinated by the ritual of the service; in this particular instance, the boy attended every service he was allowed to, and when, as a child of eleven, he was given a room to himself, he arranged

two altars before which he never omitted to bow in passing. Children's services are specially adapted to their understanding (or are meant to be) and it would be as well if children attended these services only.

The hall-mark of religion is character: "by their fruits ye shall know them." If religion fails to control the life of an individual, that religion is vain. If we are to lead children we must be prepared to live what we teach. To tell a child one thing and do another, is to make God of no account. I am convinced that silent influence is infinitely more potent than any speech. What we wish the children under our care to become that we must be ourselves. Do we wish them to speak gently we must ourselves speak gently to them, do we wish their ideals to be high we must ever be holding a high standard of conduct before them, in order that they may form their judgment from what they see and know. We must steer clear of the notion that religion is for Sunday and church, it is for every day, every hour; the atmosphere of each home reflects the religion of that house, and it is well for those children who find in their own homes a faint reflection of "the peace of God which passeth man's understanding."

Confronted with such reflections it is small wonder if women consider: Are they "religious enough" to be mothers? Moreover, have men and women passed from the barrier of sects into the breadth of the beyond, where there is neither 'my' view nor 'your' view, but God's way only. I hold they have no right to emphasize doctrinal views when teaching children; failing to believe themselves, there could be no sincerity in such lessons. I would have children taught to respect every man's faith—even the worship by a savage of his fetish. After all, it is the spirit of reverence, not the thing revered that uplifts the soul in its devotion, just as with love, it is the love given—not the creature loved—that purifies and raises human nature. Let religion for children—as for men and women—be the daily round, the common task, and let the consistency of our lives be to them the outward visible sign of the in-dwelling love of God.

THE ART OF SINGING.

BY MADAME FEININGER OF BERLIN.

SOME years ago, men of science gave much attention to investigating the cause of the dearth of great singers, for the latter half of the nineteenth century seemed to be bringing forth hardly any worthy of a place in the ranks of those who had been the acknowledged "Queens of Song." The conclusions arrived at were that the breathing technique was faulty, and that physical culture in its broadest sense was lacking. To these, we of the present time might add that many habits of living in this neurotic age are detrimental to the production of great voices; healthful nerves are requisite for tuneful resonance and enduring vocal powers.

Again, a fruitful source of the production of mediocre singers, *i.e.*, of those whose standard is just a mark below the "good," has been, and is too often still, the mediocre teaching which has abounded to a great degree. There has been until late years a woeful lack of knowledge of the most elementary principles of good singing, and of the good teaching of it among the general public, and thus many a promising and beautiful voice has been ruined in the early training. But nowadays, everyone hears more or less of "method and voice production," and the difficulty of the moment is to be sure that a "method" is not only artistic, but *physiologically sound*, and one which will not only strengthen, but beautify that most precious gift—a sweet and musical voice. In matters musical, as well as in the other realms of art, and those of science, progress is the note of the age in which we live. Precision and mechanical force *alone* will no longer suffice for the interpretation of the classical, still less for the modern, music. While the works of the old masters are often of a more or less concrete form, and their intrinsic charms of melody will make them things of beauty for all time, the modern music has been written by those who, striving to free themselves from the fetters of convention,